

VERONICA ESCOBAR
16TH DISTRICT, TEXAS

HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY PERSONNEL
SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS

HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CONSTITUTION,
CIVIL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION
AND CITIZENSHIP



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
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March 1, 2019

Commissioner Kevin McAleenan
U.S. Customs and Border Protection
1300 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Commissioner McAleenan:

As you are well aware, the El Paso sector is seeing an increase in the number of Central American families fleeing violence, persecution, and crushing poverty, a pattern that began in 2014. As the weather warms, we know those numbers will increase even more.

I have recently hosted several of my colleagues in El Paso for congressional delegation visits. During these trips, we toured holding and processing centers clearly unable to accommodate the growing number of asylum-seeking families crossing the border. We found families who, for up to six days, were forced to share concrete cells, toilets, and showers in holding facilities that were built to accommodate single, adult males for 72 hours or less. That is why I appreciate your recommendation of a Central Processing Center (CPC) for the El Paso Sector where Customs and Border Protection (CBP) can process migrant families within 72 hours or less in humane conditions.

As you also know, our local NGO, Annunciation House, provides another type of processing that happens after the migrants leave federal custody. In order to ensure that not one migrant sleeps on the streets, Annunciation House has set up 11 hospitality centers across El Paso. The El Paso community and volunteers from across the country have played an important role in assisting with these hospitality centers by volunteering as well as providing clothing, support, and meals for hundreds of migrants each day. Migrants stay in the hospitality centers for up to 48 hours while volunteers arrange their travel from El Paso to their final destination where they will await their asylum hearing. The coordination of travel arrangements takes up the most time. Because of the increasing numbers, Annunciation House has had to supplement its hospitality centers by renting hotels to accommodate the migrants and their families, spending almost \$13,250 per week since January 31 of 2019 to do so. This is unsustainable for Annunciation House and the El Paso community.

During our recent phone conversation, we discussed my request to incorporate a small space and role for Annunciation House at the new processing center. Efficiently integrating this NGO travel coordination process into the CPC would allow Annunciation House to alleviate some of the local burden that falls on my community. I am certain that if we are creative and thoughtful,

we can figure out how to achieve our mutual goal of ensuring that these vulnerable individuals get to their final destination safely and quickly once they have been processed by your agents.

I look forward to working with you to incorporate this community component in the best, most efficient way possible that does not interfere with the work of federal law enforcement, does not increase the time the migrants are being held, and helps expedite their travel coordination.

Whether it involves implementing this change through CBP pre-planning or legislation, it is critical we find a way to involve local organizations - like Annunciation House - that offer vital support for asylum seekers and local communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Veronica Escobar". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Veronica" being more prominent than the last name "Escobar".

Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress